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MONOLOGUE #5

WRITTEN BY **VANDANA SHIVA, AUTHOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST**

To hug.

To hug. To hold.

To hold and protect.

It was 43 years ago.

The women of my region - the Garhwal Himalaya – so close to the roof of the world. These women - they started an amazing movement. It was called Chipko. Chip-ko. It means to hug. The women would hug the trees to protect them from being logged. And while they hugged the trees, they sang. Songs about how the forests give us water and soil and air, and not just timber and profits.

I joined Chipko as a volunteer, a young student. And the women in our mountain villages taught me about the forests, the soil, and the water, about how they are all connected. Today you call that the ecological service, the function of nature. The Chipko women taught me that water was central – to women's lives and their economic empowerment. I carried that idea to the Doon Valley, and to Bhopal, to Plachimada and Nellore. The right to water - clean, safe, potable water is the basis of all the women's ecological struggles that I have been a part of.

1981 ...

I was invited by the Government of India - the Ministry of Environment – to study the impact of limestone mining in the Doon Valley. I went because this was my home. And again, it was the local women who showed me how limestone was the source of their water - their springs and streams. They would have to walk 10 miles, each way, to get drinking water, from where the streams had not been destroyed. Yet.

That study and our assessment of the terrible cost of mining brought the voices of the women to our Supreme Court. The mines were closed. The courts ruled: when commerce destroys life, commerce must stop, because life must carry on. Women uphold the economy of life. They do this by providing sustenance. The ruling of the court was a recognition of nature's economy, of women's economy, which is centered on water as life .



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2005. Another study for the National Commission on Women. What was the impact of the water crisis on women, what were the alternatives for women's empowerment through their access to water? Statistic: the per capita availability had dropped from 5177 cubic metres to 1820. As the water got depleted and polluted, women would walk further for it. The cost of water was also the cost of the time for these women.

Statistic: 150 million women days. Each year.

10 billion Rupees. Each year.

As agriculture came to depend on chemicals, it became the biggest drain on water. And women. This water, flowing out of chemical farms, carries nitrates and pesticides - killing streams and lakes and rivers. Spreading cancer.

There is a train that travels every night from Punjab to Bikaner. It has come to be known as 'the cancer train'. A single village could have hundreds, thousands of affected inhabitants. When you ask me, "Why Organic?", I say because we must take the poison out of the water. We must make our soil a reservoir. To hold water. The fewer the chemicals, the lesser the poison. The fewer the chemicals, the lesser the irrigation. The more the water for women. It's that simple.

Statistic: chemical agriculture accounts for 40% of the Green House Gases.

Almost half of the Climate Crisis.

Degradation. Desertification. Displacement.

When land has been abused it can no longer support life. Dead land can no longer support living.

When you ask me, "Why Organic?", I say because we return life and matter to the soil. Take carbon from the air and put it back in the soil, where it belongs.

Statistic: 1% increase in soil organic matter.

100,000 litre increase in the water holding capacity of soil per hectare.

The holding capacity.

I promote and practice organic farming because it is a solution. A solution for water, for food security ... a solution for our health and the health of our climate.

A solution for women's empowerment, and for peace.